DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 462 234 RC 023 388

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TITLE	Language Planning in a Trans-National Speech Community.
PUB DATE	2002-00-00
NOTE	9p.; In: Indigenous Languages across the Community. Proceedings of the Annual Conference on Stabilizing Indigenous Languages (7th, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, May 11-14, 2000); see RC 023 385.
AVAILABLE FROM	For full text: http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~jar/ILAC/.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Educational Needs; Educational Strategies; Foreign Countries; Indigenous Populations; *Language Maintenance; *Language Planning; Latin Americans
IDENTIFIERS	Afro Caribbeans; Garifuna; Garifuna People

ABSTRACT

Language revitalization efforts in Garifuna communities are complicated by their dispersion in Central America, St. Vincent, and the United States. Garifuna language and culture originated on the Caribbean island of St. Vincent, with the mixing of African and Arawakan languages. After the British conquered the island, they relocated thousands of Garifuna to islands off Honduras. From there, Garifuna people moved to the Honduran mainland, Belize, Guatemala, and Nicaragua. Since the 1950s, many Garifuna people have moved to the United States, establishing sizeable communities in Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles. Language revitalization efforts vary widely across Garifuna communities, depending on the extent of language shift. Exposure of Garifuna communities to various other languages--Spanish, English, Belize Creole, and American Indian languages--affects sensibilities towards orthography and complicates efforts to create a working standardized Garifuna orthography. Simply arranging a forum in which to have meaningful policy discussions can be a major political and logistic challenge. The potential to organize and plan language revitalization projects was greatly increased by the formation of a pan-Central American organization for Black and Black-Indigenous peoples and the creation of a Garifuna Web site and listserv. The development of a Garifuna language policy statement and plan is described, and strategies are suggested for their dissemination and implementation. (SV)

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Language Planning in a Trans-National Speech Community

Geneva Langworthy

Language revitalization efforts in the Garifuna Nation are complicated by the fact that the Garifuna community spans Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala, Belize, St. Vincent, and also the United States (see Figure 1). Establishment of shared language preservation goals and strategies is hampered by geographic dispersion, poor communication technologies, linguistic and sociolinguistic differences, and lack of resources. Unification within the Garifuna Nation, however, empowers language renewal efforts in this trans-national community.

The distribution of Garifuna communities and the decline of the Garifuna language are rooted in their history. The histories of other indigenous languages that are in decline reflect similar themes of cultural conflict. Garifuna language and culture originated on the Caribbean island of St. Vincent, with the mixing of Africans and Iñeri (Arawakan). The Garinagu (*plural*) resisted European incursion until the Carib War of 1795-1797. British victors separated the defeated Garinagu by complexion, banishing the darker-skinned Garinagu from their island homeland and beginning the Garifuna Diaspora.

The British forcefully moved 2,000 Garinagu to the Bay Islands off Honduras. From there, Garifuna people moved to the Honduran mainland, settling along the coast as far north as Belize City and south to Pearl Lagoon in Nicaragua. Since the 1950s, many Garifuna people have moved to the United States, establishing sizeable communities in Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles. The Garinagu who remained on St. Vincent following the Carib War were forbidden

Figure 1. Locations of Garifuna communities in the Caribbean and Central America.

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by the British to speak their language. Garinagu in the Diaspora, however, put great emphasis on maintaining their language as a part of their Garifuna identity, or *Garifuna-duaü*. Thus, the Garifuna language was lost on their homeland *Yurumei*, but the language and culture have been maintained in Honduras, Guatemala, and Belize.

There are slight cultural and sociolinguistic differences within the Garifuna Nation, but Garifuna communities still share a common culture and ancestral language in spite of geographic dispersion. Phonological differences exist, of course; for example, there are some dialects that delete intervocalic r. Lexical differences are found based on geography as well. For instance, the important *dügü* ceremony is referred to as *wálagayo* in Nicaragua. Nonetheless, Garinagu share the same ethnolinguistic norms as part of their culture, regardless of their location.

Family ties are not restricted by national boundaries either. People tend to have family in both the United States and Central America, and they may have family in more than one Central American country as well. Garifuna people are known for multilingualism, which is often necessary just for communication with relatives.

Language shift began in the Garifuna community about 20 years ago, although its effects have been dramatically different depending on the region. In Nicaragua, only a few individuals speak the Garifuna language. Honduras, in contrast, has communities in which Garifuna is still the first language of the children. In general, however, inter-generational shift from Garifuna to Creole, English, or Spanish is occurring throughout the Garifuna community.

For a number of years, the Garifuna community has struggled to be identified as a Nation, uniting across borders to work towards the common good and the perpetuation of the Garifuna people. Although no accurate figure is available, the global Garifuna population may be around 200,000; the number of speakers, however, is far fewer. Major concerns in the Garifuna Nation are not dissimilar to those of other indigenous peoples: the need for land security, for economic improvement and self-sustainability, and for maintenance and preservation of their traditional language, culture, and ideology.

Sociolinguistic Differences and Language Revitalization Goals

Language revitalization goals vary somewhat throughout the Garifuna Nation, which is a reflection of sociolinguistic differences. St. Vincent has no living speakers; the last Carib speaker died in 1932 (Taylor, 1951). English-speaking *Yurumei-na* (Garinagu from St. Vincent) have been reaching out to the Garifuna community in Belize to try to re-learn their language and culture. In Nicaragua, there are reportedly only a few elderly speakers, and a major goal there is the offering of basic language instruction.

Honduras has more complicated circumstances and goals. A significant number of children have Garifuna as their first language. Others have only passive comprehension, and still other children have no Garifuna. In general, this varies by village. The Garifuna community of Honduras united with other indigenous

people to demand more culturally and linguistically appropriate education for their children. As a result, the Ministry of Education began development of a nation-wide Educación Bilingüe Intercultural program, with funding from the World Bank (ADEPRIR, 1995). Dissatisfaction with the progress of the program (Griffin, 1997) has been overshadowed by escalating conflicts over land between indigenous people and wealthy investors in the Honduran government—conflict that has led to bloodshed several times (Langworthy, 1999).

Guatemala has a modest but thriving Garifuna community in Lívingston, or *Labuga*. Isolation seems to have helped this community to maintain the language and culture, but, as an increasingly popular tourist spot and natural trade location, Labuga is becoming more and more heterogeneous. The Garifuna community of Guatemala, which is concentrated in a small area, is well organized and has Garifuna programming on the local radio station and has pilot language instruction programs. However, acceleration of language shift in Labuga is a major concern.

Inter-generational language shift has been most dramatic in Belize, where five of the six Garifuna communities have shifted to Creole within the last two generations. Garinagu in Belize are concerned about reversing language shift. In addition, there is interest in documentation and policy, for example, standardizing the Garifuna orthography (Cayetano, 1992). In 1993, the National Garifuna Council of Belize published *Dimurei-agei*, the *People's Garifuna Dictionary*, produced by the Garifuna Lexicography Project (Cayetano, 1993). Finally, in the United States, Garinagu are interested in adult instruction in their language and the possibility of Garifuna language instruction for their children (such as after school classes or, possibly, summer language camps in Central America). Meetings at the level of the Nation to form and articulate language policy must deal with the sociolinguistic differences that create diverse language planning goals.

Technical and Logistic Challenges

The Garifuna situation is fairly unusual in that the Nation encompasses not just two or three different countries but several, including countries that are not adjacent. Within the Nation, Spanish, English, and Belize Creole are regularly spoken in addition to Garifuna; in certain locations, Maya, Miskito, or Ebonics may be spoken in Garifuna communities as well. In Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua, Garinagu are taught in Spanish, while in Belize, the United States, and St. Vincent, they are educated in English. At the very least, this affects a speaker's sensibilities towards orthography. Spanish-speaking Garinagu, for example, use *j* for [h] and *gu* for [g] in certain contexts. English-speaking Garinagu, on the other hand, do not mind seeing their language written with *c* to represent [k] or seeing the occasional geminate consonant. These issues have caused considerable delay and conflict in the adoption of a working standardized Garifuna orthography (Cayetano, 1995).

Simply arranging the forum in which to have meaningful language policy and revitalization discussions can be a major political and logistic challenge in the Garifuna Nation. Where and when to meet and who should be involved may

determine the success of such efforts. Informal and occasional networking between Garifuna leaders led to a lot of brainstorming and good ideas, but these ideas were difficult to enact; most language renewal efforts in the Garifuna Nation through the mid-1990s were localized in countries or communities. Two events led to a major breakthrough in the potential to organize and plan language revitalization projects for the Garifuna Nation: the formation of the Central American Black Organization, or Organización Negra Centroamericana (CABO/ ONECA), and the creation of a Garifuna Web site and e-mail list: Garifuna-World and GarifunaLink.

The GarifunaLink and CABO. In 1995, Belizean and Honduran Garifuna leaders agreed that some sort of pan-Central American Black organization could help empower all Black people in Central America and organize co-operation between Garifuna organizations in each country. CABO/ONECA was set up as an umbrella organization to which all other Garifuna organizations and many Black organizations in Central America belong. They have an annual meeting at which projects or referenda may be proposed for adoption by the organization, which, in essence, means receiving the support of all Black and indigenous Black people in Central America. CABO provides an official voice for the Garifuna Nation and the power of organization and unification.

The potential to co-ordinate such meetings and to facilitate communication between international Garifuna leaders and activists was greatly enhanced by the GarifunaLink, an e-mail list created in 1997 by José and Tomás Avila. This allowed instant communication between Garifuna leaders and language activists in the United States, Belize, Honduras, Guatemala, and even St. Vincent. The percentage of Garinagu able to access the Internet in order to benefit from the GarifunaLink or the Garifuna-World Web site, however, varies drastically between countries. Most GarifunaLink users are, not surprisingly, in the United States, and Belize has several times as many subscribers as Honduras, despite its much smaller Garifuna population. The need for greater access to computer technology and the Internet in isolated Garifuna communities is an educational and economic challenge that affects language maintenance. Nonetheless, the GarifunaLink has been a tremendous tool, contributing to language revitalization efforts in this trans-national speech community.

A Language Policy and Plan for the Garifuna Nation

In 1997, language planning discussion among Garifuna leaders and language activists led to a call for a language policy statement for the Garifuna Nation. A committee was formed to prepare a draft statement, which was then presented for adoption to the National Garifuna Council (NGC) of Belize. The Language Preservation Committee then took the draft language policy statement together with a Garifuna Nation language preservation plan to the annual meeting of CABO/ONECA in Labuga (Livingston, Guatemala). The policy and plan were translated into Spanish by the Organización de Desarrollo Etnico Comunitario (ODECO), the Garifuna organization based in La Ceiba, Honduras. CABO/

ONECA discussed, modified, and then ratified the Language Policy Statement of the Garifuna Nation and the Garifuna National Language Preservation Plan.

Adoption of a Garifuna language policy and plan was generally considered a major step in Garifuna language revitalization. Making reference to the United Nations Draft Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People, the Language Policy Statement claims the right of Garifuna people to educate their children in Garifuna. The policy also calls for elaboration of literature and teaching materials in Garifuna, makes a plea for reclaiming Garifuna as the language of the home, calls for standardization of the orthography and innovation of new vocabulary, and mandates that the goals of the policy be enacted at all levels in the Garifuna Nation. The assumption behind the policy was that each village would develop a language renewal plan to articulate the specific needs of the village, which would in turn reflect the goals of the Garifuna Nation plan. In this way, the Nation had a unified vision of language maintenance that still allowed for flexibility in all circumstances.

Implementing the language policy and its results. The Language Policy Statement of the Garifuna Nation provided a legal framework by which Garifuna organizations and communities could request not just recognition but also resources and support from national governments for bilingual intercultural education and related language renewal programs. However, so far, there has been little opportunity for communities to pursue such goals; language revitalization concerns have taken a back seat to local politics in the form of battles to retain traditional land holdings.

Some Garifuna communities have developed language preservation plans as a response to the new plan and policy. Hopes of sharing methodologies and teaching materials continue to be held back by problems of communication, transportation, and lack of funds within the Garifuna Nation. In general, language maintenance and renewal efforts in the Garifuna Nation today continue to be fairly localized and discrete.

Outlook for the New Millennium

The strategy of developing an overall unifying language policy and plan that allows for flexibility at the community level seems to be a good one for a trans-national speech community such as the Garifuna Nation. The community is certainly strengthened by its unification as a Nation over and above each community's separate identification as Honduran, Belizean, or Guatemalan.

One problem with the implementation of the Language Policy and the Language Preservation Plan is that it was assumed they would have a sort of "trickle-down" effect, that once the Policy and Plan had been adopted, communities would be able to initiate their own programs. Unfortunately, the Policy and Plan have not been disseminated to the majority of the Garifuna community. The logistics of making these documents more available are daunting. Although the documents are posted on the Garifuna-World Web site, most Garinagu in Central America do not have access to the World Wide Web. Photocopying is surprisingly expensive, inaccessible, and unreliable in parts of

Central America. So simply distributing copies to each isolated Garifuna village is a major undertaking.

However, greater distribution of the Language Policy Statement and the National Language Preservation Plan are important to language revitalization efforts in the Garifuna Nation because these documents are empowering; they help to establish common language preservation goals and expectations throughout the Garifuna Nation, and they provide an organizational framework for villages and communities innovating their own specific plans.

A couple of logical "next steps" present themselves in the struggle for Garifuna language maintenance. Sharing language maintenance materials and methodologies is crucial in these circumstances. Teachers in Garifuna communities can be overwhelmed by the effort to develop their own culturally and linguistically appropriate materials. For sharing of such materials to occur, however, there must be a much greater degree of communication among Garifuna teachers and language activists.

Annual or biannual conferences, workshops, and seminars could be arranged that bring Garifuna teachers together to share ideas, materials, and methodologies. These events should involve participation by Garifuna teachers in Honduras, Belize, and Guatemala, as well as elsewhere. Training could be made available for teachers trying to teach children who do not speak Garifuna as well as for teachers trying to teach Garifuna-speaking children to read in their language. In this way, models could be developed for teaching Garifuna as a second language and for teaching literacy in Garifuna.

Encouragement and support for the production of literature in Garifuna could be actively offered by regional Garifuna NGOs so that individuals interested in writing in the Garifuna language will find it easier to publish their works. Orthographic and lexical issues, among others, could be decided by an international Garifuna Language Committee comprised of Garifuna language specialists representing each country, as called for by the Language Policy.

The tremendous geographic range of the Garifuna community (the result of the Garifuna Diaspora) can have some advantages, which the Garifuna Nation should exploit as much as possible in language revival efforts. Each region, actually, has something special to offer. Honduras, Belize, and Guatemala are where the language and culture have survived and have been maintained. Honduras has a very large Garifuna population and well-organized and effective Garifuna NGOs. Belize has Native linguist Roy Cayetano and other committed language activists. Garifuna communities in the United States have substantial financial and technological resources. Co-operation within the Nation could lead to co-ordinated language preservation plans. For example, Hopkins Village in Belize, where the Garifuna language is still spoken, has been suggested as a location for a language immersion summer school for Garifuna kids from the United States, St. Vincent, and elsewhere.

Continued language planning and revitalization efforts in the Garifuna Nation are hampered by lack of communication. The GarifunaLink has been a huge leap forward, but there are still many Garinagu who do not have access to this

technology and are, therefore, "out of the loop." Even conventional physical travel between Garifuna villages can be time-consuming and arduous.

The other missing ingredient important for language renewal in the Garifuna Nation is funding. Local governments, for the most part, have not been supportive. Garifuna communities have always been poor; therefore, the Nation itself has no real financial resources to commit. Access to information about international funding agencies in not easily available, nor is professional grant writing guidance. There is certainly a great deal of will and desire in the Garifuna community to revitalize the language. However, virtually all language renewal efforts require some degree of funding, which is sorely lacking in Garifuna language preservation efforts.

In conclusion, the Garifuna Nation faces an unusual challenge in revitalizing its language because Garifuna communities are so geographically dispersed and divergent. Establishment of the Language Policy and Language Preservation Plan provided a valuable foundation for renewal efforts because they represent a unified vision for Garifuna language maintenance. Next, Garifuna leaders, teachers, and language activists need to meet to establish functional lines of communication and to elaborate materials and methodological models. In order to facilitate these steps, considerable funding will need to be raised.

The Garifuna language has a remarkable history and has somehow survived the Garifuna Diaspora against all odds. The language has a special value in Garifuna culture; to speak Garifuna is to be Garifuna. Studying the past raises questions about the Garifuna future: Given the effects of the Garifuna Diaspora, if people stop speaking Garifuna, will they still be Garifuna? Because the Garifuna language is such an important part of Garifuna identity, when the Garifuna language is lost, will their race be lost as well?

History both burdens and blesses the present, and the Garifuna Nation follows its destiny. The survival of the Garifuna language will be determined by actions now and in the future and by individuals throughout the Garifuna Nation sharing an understanding of the value and importance of the Garifuna language legacy.

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